

123

170

30
14

THE
OFFICIAL CHARACTER AND DUTY
OF THE
GOSPEL MESSENGER;

A SERMON

Preached in St. Paul's Church, Edenton

N. C. APRIL 30, 1820.

UPON THE OCCASION OF ADMITTING

WILLIM HOOPER AND THOMAS WRIGHT,

AS DEACONS,

AND

THE REV'D. RICHARD S. MASON,

TO THE HOLY OFFICE OF PRIESTHOOD,

BY ADAM EMPIE, A. M.

Rector of St. James Church, Wilmington, N. C.

Fayetteville:
PRINTED BY CARNEY & DISMUKES.

1820.

TO THE READER.

The Author deems it an act of justice to himself, to state, that the following Sermon was written without the remotest prospect of its ever being submitted to the public, and that it owes its publication to the request of the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the State of North-Carolina.

A SERMON.

MALACHI—Chapter 2d, Verse 7.

“ The Priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek
“ the law at his mouth. For he is the Messenger of the Lord of
“ Hosts.”

THREE things, here, present themselves to our notice.

1st. The Official Character of the Gospel Minister. He is the
Messenger of the Lord of Hosts.

2d. The duty of the Gospel Minister. His lips must keep know-
ledge.

3d. The Duty of his Flock. They must seek the law at his
mouth.

We shall briefly consider these in the order stated.

First—The *Official Character* of the Gospel Minister.—
He is the *Messenger of the Lord of Hosts*. He comes neither
unsolicited nor unauthorised. His authority is not assumed,
but duly conferred ; and he is distinguished from others by
being *sent* as the Ambassador of Jesus Christ. If he is sin-
cere in his professions, the Divine Spirit, “ from whom all
holy desires proceed,” has *inwardly moved and called* him
to the work of the Ministry. Those successors of the Apos-
tles, who are invested with the ordaining power, have cloth-
ed him with a valid *external commission*. He addresses us,
not as the ambassador of man, but, as the Minister of God,
the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts. He comes as the di-

p19801

vinely appointed "legate of the skies." He who said, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," appointed an order of men that was never to become extinct, and whose authority was to be transmitted, through an unbroken line of ministerial succession, unto the end of time. Deriving their appointment and their authority, from this source, the duly ordained and qualified Ministers of the Gospel do not take too much upon themselves, when they address us, in the language of the Apostle—"Now then we are *Ambassadors for Christ*, as though God did beseech you, by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God."

As the *authority* of the Gospel Messenger, so his *message* also, is divine. For man to know the will of God, unless God is pleased to reveal it, and to be authorised to preach that will, unless that authority comes from Heaven, are two things equally impossible. God alone, is competent to teach us what truths we ought to believe, and what duties we ought to practice. To guess at the will of God, and to make ourselves, by our own authority, the Messengers of the Lord of Hosts, would be equally vain and presumptuous. When an earthly King sends an Ambassador to a foreign Court, he not only gives him authority to act, but he also accompanies that authority with instructions. A messenger necessarily implies a message.

Further, the King of Heaven would not send messengers, except upon *business relating to his kingdom*; nor would he employ such agents, except in matters of *great importance*.

Accordingly, the Ministers of the Gospel come in the name of God, to proclaim his laws and to manage the spiritual affairs of his earthly kingdom. Their object is, to "turn men from darkness to light and from the power of

Satan to serve the living God." This office will be necessary, as long as man remains a sinner. And to this extent, has the great head of the Church made provision, by appointing an order of men, who are to perpetuate themselves by successively ordaining others as long as time endures and who are to encrease the number of their order, until the whole earth is supplied with them. For he, who appointed the Christian Embassy, said to them, "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you. Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And he accordingly commanded them, to "go and teach all nations and to preach the Gospel to every creature." They are then, the messengers of the Lord of Hosts, to proclaim the laws of his Kingdom, to teach the ignorant, to warn the disobedient, to bring back the wanderer, to comfort the mourner, to help the weak, to subdue the rebellious; in fine, to dispense the blessings of the New Covenant and to manage all the visible affairs, of God's Spiritual Kingdom in this world, until the end of time.

Many parts of God's word and ways are mysterious; many truths and duties of Religion cannot be known, except from Revelation, and many are neglected or opposed by the unrenewed heart, because they cannot be attended to, without much self-denial. But God is desirous, that men should so act as to secure his favor. And as they are naturally averse to this, in the multitude of his mercies, he not only bestows upon them the influences of his Spirit, but he also sends his messengers to them, to persuade them to work out their own salvation, and to dispense to them all those sacred and mysterious truths, which should habitually influence their conduct. The Ministers of the Gospel are, therefore in their letter of instructions, stiled "*The Stewards of the*

Mysteries of God." For they are sent and they are officially bound to dispense his truths, to administer his ordinances, and thus to establish, extend and perpetuate his Church.

By nature, man is in a state of "enmity against God;" and though, through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, God is reconcileable to man, still man must first be reconciled to God, by submitting to his government and by being created anew in his image, before God can acknowledge him as his child and deal with him as a reconciled Father with his penitent, though once prodigal Son. And this "*ministry of reconciliation*," the Lord of Hosts has committed to his Messengers. They are sent to proclaim peace on earth and good will to men, and to use all their influence, to reconcile men to God, by bringing them over to the obedience of his laws. They are sent to act as *watchmen also*, on the walls of Zion, to preside over the interests of the Church, to protect it from harm, to repel the assaults of its foes and to warn their people against danger, as well as to preserve them from evil. They are sent for "*the edification of the body of Christ*," to be "ensamples to the flock," and helpers of their joy," to shew the way in which they should walk and the work they should do, to "hear the word at the mouth of the Lord," and to "give the people warning;" to "shew the people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins." They are sent to act, as "*stewards of the household of God*," and as the *Shepherds of his Flock*, to "give them their meat in due season," to "feed them with the sincere milk of the word," and with "the bread of life;" to lead them to that "fountain of living water," which is "opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness," and in fine, to watch over the spiritual and eternal interests of all, that are committed to their care. Hence the

Lord cautions all his messengers, “ Take heed to thyself and to thy doctrines and continue in them, that so doing, thou mayest both save thyself and those that hear thee.” “ Take heed to thyself and to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made thee Overseer ; warning every man and teaching every man, that thou mayest present every one perfect in Christ Jesus.” “ Preach the word, be instant in season and out of season,” that is, whether it be convenient to you or not. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine,” “ Accomplish the work of an Evangelist,” Make full proof of thy Ministry.” “ Watch for souls, as those that must give account.”

The Messengers of the Lord of Hosts are also sent, as “*labourers together with God*,” and they are required to make themselves “ workmen that need not to be ashamed ; rightly dividing the word of truth.” By his providences, by his word and by his spirit, God is labouring to reclaim the Children of men from their evil ways, and to bring them over to the service of the Lord. The messengers of the Lord of Hosts are employed in this same work, and they are therefore called “ fellow-workers with God.” And as they labour to bring men to the light of the truth and to diffuse that light abroad over the whole earth ; as likewise, through their instrumentality, the gospel becomes the means of preserving multitudes from sin and everlasting ruin, they are described as being the “ salt of the earth, and the light of the word,” and they are required to retain and exercise their preserving qualities and to let their “ light shine, to the glory of their heavenly father.”

In fine, the messengers of the Lord of Hosts are sent, *to establish, to preserve and to govern the visible Church of God on earth, to manage all its concerns, to extend its influence*

and to spread the Gospel over the whole world, to explain, to teach and to enforce those laws, which the King of Kings has published for the government of his intelligent creatures in this section of his dominions, to reclaim as many as possible, of those who have rebelled against his authority and his government, for the purpose of thus rescuing them from impending destruction and securing to them, through the peace speaking blood of Jesus, a new and glorious title to immortal life and happiness ; they are sent to direct every sincere enquirer, to comfort every penitent mourner, to set up a holy example to all around them, administer the sacraments and ordinances of the Church, to “ contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,” to “ hold fast the form of sound words,” and all those invaluable institutions, which by the kind providence of our God, have been preserved from a thousand dangers and transmitted in safety, to our times, and to expose the errors, unmask the designs and repel the attempts of all those who mutilate, pervert or adulterate the blessed word of God.

Such my Brethren, is the official character of the Gospel Minister. Such are the source, the design and the extent of his authority. He is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts, and such is his message, such are his functions and such his powers.

We come now *secondly*, to consider *the duties of the Gospel Minister*. *His lips must keep knowledge*. This expresses but two main branches of his duty, knowledge and teaching ; but *all the rest are implied in his official character*, and may with ease be inferred from what has already been said.

The first requisite of every Gospel Minister is holiness. And though this is not mentioned in the text, it certainly is implied. God is holy, his law is holy, he wishes us to be

come holy. He sends his Messengers to turn us "from sin to holiness," he reveals "his wrath against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men," and he declares, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Is it not then necessary, that when the God of Holiness, employs his agents to turn men from sin to holiness, those agents should themselves be holy? The work of the ministry is a holy work. Are unholy persons fit for such employment? Can light and darkness hold communion together? Can the children of Satan be employed in erecting the kingdom of God? Can they preach with holy zeal against sin, who themselves live in the habitual practice of it? Can they teach others who have never been taught themselves? Can the blind lead the blind? What can we expect from the unrenewed preacher, but cold, barren, vague inefficient, and uninteresting views of faith, repentance, humility, love and every other holy duty? How can he teach others, what he has never experienced himself, and what cannot be fully understood, except by personal experience? In fine, how can he, who is carnal in his views, over whose heart is spread an impenetrable veil of ignorance and error, who is still walking in spiritual darkness, how can such a one duly direct the enquirer on his way to Zion? How can he comfort those who are mourning for their sins? How can he teach the christian in his spiritual warfare, to grapple with his spiritual foes? How can he, adequately describe those holy tempers, qualities and dispositions, and those pious exercises of heart, to which he is an utter stranger? Above all, how can he set them a godly example? Unholy Ministers cannot properly do these things, and even if they had the ability, they have not the disposition and they cannot, therefore, discharge their duties as Messengers of the Lord of Hosts. Holiness of heart

and life then, is essentially necessary to the Gospel Messenger.

Besides, no one can be in the full sense of the expression, a Messenger of the Lord of Hosts, unless he is *called and sent by the Lord*, as well as by man. He must be *outwardly* "*called of God, as was Aaron,*" and he must be "*inwardly moved by the holy Ghost,*" as he professes to be in the Ordination service. If he has been ordained by those who derive their ordaining power in a direct line from the Apostles, he has indeed an outward and a valid call to ministerial labours. He may be quite useful, and as long as he is not flagrantly deficient, we are bound to respect him as the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts. But nevertheless, if he is not honest and zealous and faithful in the sacred cause, from a love of God, a love of Religion and a love of Souls, he never has been moved by the Holy Ghost, he never has received an inward call from God ; and as long as he continues in this state, God may indeed bless his labours to others but he will never regard them as an acceptable service on his own account ; and though he should say "Lord, Lord, have I not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name, cast out devils and in thy name, done many wonderful works ; he must expect the appalling answer, "I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Holiness of heart and life are then, necessary qualifications for the official characters of the Lords Messengers. Though others may be outwardly called, the Spirit of God would inwardly call none but such ; nor should any receive or apply for ordination, until they are conscious of such holy desires and resolutions to serve God, in his Church ; that they have reason to believe and declare themselves, "*called and moved by the Holy Ghost to the work of the Ministry.*"

Let it then be repeated, holiness of heart and life are necessary in the official character of the Lord's Messengers, because they *cannot properly deliver their message* or fulfil their mission without them. *They are required to be "holy,"* to "take heed to themselves and their doctrine," and to set a holy example before their flocks. They are required as faithful Stewards, to dispense the mysteries of God, to "feed the lambs and the sheep," to be the "salt of the earth and the light of the world." These duties they cannot possibly perform unless their hearts and lives are devoted to God's service. Finally, the messengers of the Lord should be holy men, because *this is expressly required of them, under the severest penalties.* "Be ye holy, that bear the vessels of the Lord." "Thou, O man of God, follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." "Be thou an example to believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." "In all things shew thyself a pattern of good works." "Wo to the Shepherds that feed not the flock." "Wo be to the pastors that destroy and scatter the Sheep of my pasture saith the Lord." "Wo unto you ye blind guides."

The second requisite of the Gospel Minister is knowledge. We use this word here, in a restricted sense. In scripture and in our text, it has a very extensive signification. *The Minister of the Gospel ought to have an experimental, as well as a scientific knowledge of religion.* His knowledge ought to arise, not only from memory and reasoning but also from his own consciousness. And when he speaks of repentance and faith of humility and charity, of the love and the fear of God, of the Christian's hopes and joys and prospects, of his spiritual struggles, his holy tempers and the heavenly exercise of his heart, the messenger of the Lord ought to be

able to understand and illustrate all these from his own history, character and personal experience, as well as from observation, the testimony of others and the word of God. And both these kinds of knowledge are intended in the text. But the former has already been considered under holiness of heart, and the latter is only *a part* of the knowledge we possess. Besides that knowledge which may be collected from experience as well as from scripture, there is much other knowledge with which every Minister of the Lord Jesus ought to be familiar. And whatever piety or zeal may be alleged in extenuation, the literary ignorance of many who undertake to preach the Gospel, is every where producing the most lamentable effects and is an evil, against which, the Church of God, ought to raise the most effectual and competent barriers.

Many stand always ready to weaken the influence of our labours by doubting, disputing and denying the truth of revelation and we ought therefore to be able to "stop the mouths of gainsayers;" "to give a reason for the hope that is in us;" to hold the infidel up to view, in all his weakness; to expose all his artifices, substitutes and sophistry; to hunt him from every point at which he takes his stand, and from every subterfuge under which he conceals the weakness of his cause and to establish the truth of the holy oracles upon the broad basis of reason and philosophy, of history and fact.

Multitudes disfigure, prevent and "render of none effect, the word of God," by their bold, their ignorant and their licentious interpretations; while others cavil at its mysteries, deny its spirituality or fritter it down into a spiritless system of morals. As we are bound to "hold fast the form of sound words," and "sharply to rebuke those who are

not sound in the faith," as all perversion of scripture is more or less dangerous to morals and piety, and as we cannot "fulfil our ministry," unless we guard our flocks against the errors, the dangers and the temptations that surround them, we ought, if possible, to be so universally and minutely acquainted with the scriptures, both in the originals and the translation, as to be able, satisfactorily, to expose all error and enthusiasm, to answer every argument and objection that are adduced in their support, and to establish every scriptural truth and duty, by the sober canons of sacred criticism, and by a particular reference to that which must decide all religious controversy, "the law and the testimony."

Much knowledge too is necessary, to enable us to answer all the objections, to remove all the difficulties, to expose all the errors and to relieve as far as possible, the spiritual wants and maladies of our flocks. Without much experimental, much scriptural and much general knowledge, our stock will soon be exhausted, we shall do little more than travel the same beaten track over and over again, and our hearers will be compelled to suffer for our mental impotence and literary sterility.

Much critical, historical, theological, scriptural and experimental knowledge then, is necessary to enable the Messengers of the Lord to perform their duty. As they are not authorized to preach, unless they are called of God and duly ordained by man, so they are *not qualified* to preach, unless they have something more than mere piety and zeal and a little imperfect knowledge of scripture, to recommend them.

The Priest's lips should keep knowledge. This does not mean merely, that the Priest should *possess knowledge*, but also that he *should use it*, for the benefit of the people. Our

piety, our knowledge and our zeal should all be employed in the service of God and of his Church. Our flocks stand in need of all the instruction we can possibly give them, and all the knowledge we possess, is to be laid out to their advantage, both in public and in private. We must let our light shine. We must improve our talents, and make full proof of our ministry.

My Brethren, has the Lord of Hosts sent his own Messengers to address you? Has he given it in charge, that the Priest's lips should keep knowledge—that they should not satisfy themselves with ignorant, unsubstantial and declamatory discourses, but that they should be competent to “handle the word of God” ably and wisely? Remember, all this is for your edification, and *you are required* to seek the law at our mouth. This is the third head of discourse. If the Priest's lips must keep knowledge, *it is that the people should seek the law at his mouth.*

The law of God, my brethren, contains the rule of our conduct—the statutes of Jehovah's kingdom, by which we are to be governed and judged. And though every one ought to be familiar with these laws, because they are of infinite importance and easy to be had and understood, yet man is prone to neglect them, to misunderstand them, to misapply them; prone to undervalue and to find fault with them, and so prone to disobey them, that he breaks them from day to day. High and dreadful as are the sanctions and penalties they contain; great and glorious as are the blessings they promise; reasonable and useful and necessary as is our compliance with their demands—still, through forgetfulness and through our natural aversion to the spirituality and the restraints of the holy laws of God, *we are constantly in need of being reminded of them, and urged to obey them.*

Now, this is *the main purpose* for which the Lord of Hosts sends us his Messengers ; and we ought therefore, to “take the more earnest heed to what they say.” They are sent to promote our spiritual and everlasting good, and we ought therefore to receive and listen to them with gratitude and pleasure. It is the love of God that sends them. His anxiety to make us holy, in order to prepare us for future happiness, induces him to employ them in the cause of our salvation. And as it is reasonable for us to love happiness and to dread misery, it is equally reasonable that we should eagerly, joyfully and thankfully hail and receive the Messengers of the Lord. To be deprived of them is a sore judgment, and to enjoy the benefits of a pious, learned and evangelical ministry is, next to life, the greatest of human blessings.

Divine Providence has blessed you, my brethren, with a settled Pastor. I pray you remember that he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts, and that it is *your duty* to seek the law at his mouth. Both in public and in private, respect his character and office, for they are sacred. Give heed to his instructions, for he delivers a message from God. Attend regularly to his ministrations, for he is appointed to watch over your souls and to feed you with the bread of life. His duties are awfully great, responsible and holy—assist, encourage and deal tenderly and liberally with him. Remember, he teaches in the name and by the authority of God, and you will have to answer in the day of judgment, for the use you make of his instructions. Seek the law, therefore, at his mouth, both in public and in private. Have you difficulties, or doubts, or fears—do you need instruction, advice or comfort—behold your Shepherd, your guide, your counsellor, your friend, your comforter. Seek at his mouth publicly and privately, that you may learn, both your spiritual interests, and your spiritual duties.

My Rev'd. Brother, and you my Brethren, who are now to be admitted to the Holy order of Deacons, the vows of God already are, or soon will be upon you. Great as is the Lord of Hosts, whose Messengers you become, inestimably important as are the souls that may be committed to your charge, awful as is the account which you must one day render to your God, so great, so important and so awful are your high and holy duties. Immortal souls will be entrusted to your care, and you will be to them, the "savour of life" or "of death." If with holy zeal and a heart crucified to the world, you faithfully discharge your sacred trust, the divine blessing will rest upon your labours—you will have the pleasure of seeing the work of the Lord prosper in your hands—through your instrumentality, many will be converted unto God, and in that day, when the Lord Jesus "makes up his jewels," having turned many to righteousness, you will "shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars forever and ever,"

On the contrary, should you evince yourself the faithless Shepherd—should you act the part of the hireling, who neither feeds, nor watches over the flock—many poor souls would perish, but their blood would be required at your hands. I beseech you therefore, brethren, that you strive, habitually, to keep alive in your hearts, a deep sense of the infinite value of souls, of the importance of your duties, and of your awful responsibility. *Whatever you do, wherever you go, carry with you a holy solicitude for the immortal interests of your flock ; and never cease your labour, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, to bring all that are committed to your charge, to agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to ripeness, and perfectness of age in Christ.*

Thus, through God's mercy in Christ, will you "both save yourself and those who hear you ;" and when the great

Shepherd of the Sheep appeareth, you will be able to render in "your account with joy," and hear that blessed sentence from the lips of your Judge—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of thy Lord."

NOTICE, is hereby given that the next Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in North-Carolina, will be holden on Saturday the 28th day of April 1821 at 11 o'clock in the forenoon, in the City of Raleigh. All those concerned will govern themselves accordingly.

*GREGORY T. BEDELL, Sec'y.
Of the Convention.*

It is the duty of every citizen to
be true to his country and to
the principles of justice and
liberty which are the foundation
of our government.

It is the duty of every citizen to
be true to his country and to
the principles of justice and
liberty which are the foundation
of our government. It is the duty
of every citizen to be true to his
country and to the principles of
justice and liberty which are the
foundation of our government.